

Roman Laskowski In Memoriam

Professor Roman Laskowski, one of Poland's most distinguished Slavic scholars, a specialist in Polish, Czech, and the theory and methodology of linguistics, died in Kraków on June 21, 2014, after a long and severe illness.

Roman Laskowski was born on February 16, 1936 at Komarno near Lwów (now Lviv, Ukraine). Shortly after the Soviet invasion of the eastern territories of Poland on the September 17, 1939, his father was arrested by the NKVD and never returned home. Roman, his mother, and two brothers were deported to the Soviet Union. Thanks to her indefatigable resolution and heroic courage, his mother managed to save her sons' lives and to get them out of the Soviet Union. In 1946 they settled in Kietrz, Silesia, where Roman Laskowski completed his secondary school education and in 1954 matriculated at the Jagiellonian University, graduating with a degree in Slavic Philology in 1959.

Laskowski started his academic career as an employee of the Silesian Scientific Institute in Katowice (now the Silesian Institute, Katowice), and subsequently moved on to the Department (now Institute) of Slavic Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences, where he was a member of a team led by Alfred Zaręba compiling the *Atlas językowy Śląska* (Linguistic Atlas of Silesia). In the same period he was working on his doctoral dissertation on the derivation of nouns in Lach, dialects transitional to Czech. He obtained his doctoral degree from the Jagiellonian University in 1969 and his habilitation degree, also from Jagiellonian University, in 1974 with a dissertation on the morphophonology of contemporary Polish (*Studia nad morfonologią współczesnego języka polskiego*). By this time, Laskowski was already an employee of the Institute of the Polish Language at the Polish Academy of Sciences (IJP PAN), a research institute with which he would be closely associated for the rest of his life, although he also had spells of employment at the University of Gothenburg (1985–2000), the Jagiellonian University (2001–7), and the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw (2008–12).

Laskowski started his linguistic research at the IJP PAN with an analysis of Old Polish texts, in collaboration with Waclaw Twardzik (who predeceased him by just a few weeks). Laskowski appreciated working with Professor Twardzik and returned to this area many times over the years, even after he had advanced a highly precise linguistic theory of his own focusing on grammatical phenomena in modern Polish, particularly Polish morphology.

Encyclopedia entries on Laskowski characterize him as a pioneer and precursor of generative phonology. His book on the morphophonology of Polish has been frequently cited in work on generative phonology. However, the concept of morphophonology that it presents goes back to the principles elaborated in the Prague Linguistic Circle, particularly by Nikolai Trubetzkoy, who first used the concept of the morphophoneme in the representation of the members of an alternation. The fact that Laskowski's complete morphophonology for Polish, which he built up on this foundation, was acknowledged in the nascent field of generative phonology may be readily explained. Suffice it to recall the very substantial influence on the form of the phonological and morphophonological component in the generative model that came from Roman Jakobson.

Laskowski's greatest achievement may have been the creation of an original, advanced, and coherent theory of morphology. This theory has served as the framework for the description of the morphological subsystem of Polish in the Academy's *Gramatyka współczesnego języka polskiego: Morfologia*, edited by R. Grzegorzczkowska, R. Laskowski, and H. Wróbel. Laskowski's theory of morphology makes reference to Prague structuralism but takes its cue from the American distributionalism. This is particularly patent in his classification of lexical units, for which syntactic distribution serves as a basis. Probably the most elaborate intellectual construct in Laskowski's morphology is his schematic presentation of the linkage of grammatical gender in Polish nouns to the grammatical gender of Polish verbs, adjectives, and numerals. Although it takes up just two pages of print, to complete this study Laskowski had to analyze thousands of syntactical diagnostic contexts.

Another important item in Laskowski's oeuvre is his 2009 book *Język w zagrożeniu: Przyswajanie języka polskiego w warunkach polsko-szwedzkiego bilingwizmu*, on the Polish of the children of Polish immigrants in Sweden. Laskowski collected the research material for this publication over many years of observation during his time in Sweden. The book presents a cogent defence of the value of bilingualism from the social

point of view. Alongside a series of non-standard Polish constructions frequently occurring in the children's language that he observed, the book also contains well-argued advice for parents and teachers.

Laskowski's editorial work made a salient contribution to Polish linguistics. In the 1970s, when he was busy working on the university textbook of Polish grammar *Gramatyka współczesnego języka polskiego*, he was also editing a series of publications entitled *Studia gramatyczne*, which stimulated ongoing discussion of the grammar. In 1998 during the Kraków International Congress of Slavists, a group of eminent Polish linguists came up with the idea to launch an international journal dedicated to Polish linguistics, which Roman Laskowski turned into a reality. In 2004, IJP PAN published the first issue of *Studies in Polish linguistics*, and Laskowski served as its chief editor until 2012. Currently this periodical is published by the Jagiellonian University Faculty of Philology. As chief editor of *Biuletyn polskiego towarzystwa językoznawczego*, one of the oldest linguistic journals published in Poland, Laskowski was engaged in editorial activities virtually until his last days.

Professor Laskowski was deeply committed to social issues. In the 1980s he was active in the Solidarity movement, serving as deputy chairman of the Solidarity branch at the Kraków division of the Polish Academy of Sciences and deputy chairman of the national negotiations committee of Solidarity branches in all the units of the Polish Academy of Sciences throughout the country. Under Martial Law he was arrested, and on his release from prison immediately joined in the underground activities of Solidarity. He was one of the founders of the samizdat periodical *Biuletyn Małopolski*, published by Solidarity's Regional Executive Committee for Małopolska. In June 1982 he set up the Committee's program team, and later headed its opinion and analysis group. He was harassed by the police and surveillance authorities of the Polish People's Republic, and was eventually forced to leave the country. He spent many years in Sweden, serving as head of Slavic Studies at the University of Gothenburg and organizing regular symposia and conferences which were attended by academics and people from the cultural milieu, not only from Poland but also from other countries in the Communist bloc. On his return to Poland Laskowski continued his social activism, fostering the country's young democracy. He was a co-founder and one of the leaders of an association known as Ruch na Rzecz Demokracji (Movement for Democracy).

Professor Laskowski held offices in several learned societies. He was a member of the International Committee on Word Formation in

the Slavic Languages, the International Committee on the Grammatical Structure of the Slavic Languages, and the International Committee on the Phonetics and Phonology of the Slavic Languages associated with the International Committee of Slavists. In 1986 he became a member of the Royal Society of Arts and Sciences in Gothenburg. As of 1990 he was a corresponding member, and in 2001 became a full member of the philology sector of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences. He was a member of the Czech Linguistic Association (Jazykovědné sdružení). In 2010, after fifty years of membership in Polskie Towarzystwo Językoznawcze (the Polish Linguistic Society), he became an honorary member. He was elected a member of the Committee on Slavic Studies and the Committee on Linguistics at the Polish Academy of Sciences for several terms. The Knight's Cross of the Polonia Restituta Order was conferred on Professor Laskowski in recognition of his work in scholarship and on behalf of society.

With Roman Laskowski's passing, we have lost a prolific linguist, a strong advocate for Slavic studies, and an ambassador for the study of Polish worldwide. He will be sorely missed by his friends, colleagues, and students. As we mourn our loss, we can feel fortunate to have had among us a man of such high standards of academic research, keen intellect, and love of all things Polish.

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